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Sermon 513 - Philippians 4:4-8, 1 Peter 5

## Praying through Pain

Hey Good morning church family and especially if you are visiting today welcome to the family, and we are glad you are here. So we are starting a new series called Anxious for Nothing, and I don't know about you but that video was pretty intense. You can get so anxious you're up at night, don't know if you've been there - but it can feel like you are drowning. So have you ever been there, have you ever been anxious are wrestled with anxiety? This is a series for anyone with something weighing heavy on their heart and perhaps a burden that seems more than you can bear.

Now as we explore the landscape of our society it seems we are getting more and more anxious as time goes on. Let me bring up Gen Z, those 16-22, recent reports show they are in particular more anxious. I have a graph here published in the Wall Street Journal that display how anxious people feel a month. If you have one bout or more. Look at the difference in age groups. Many Gen Zers are in college and Newsweek reported, "In colleges across the nation, health services workers are besieged by stressed-out students in need of mental health support." Now how did we get here? Why is it getting worse. I'll let you do your own research on the effects of social media or screen time iGen is a great book. Suffice it to say social media and screen time has not helped. Which is why I love this picture. "When the phone was tied with a wire humans were free." And we also ran really fast.

But you don't have to be a Gen Zer to struggle with anxiety. I think of people who have come out expressing their bouts with it. Donny Osmond some of you remember that performer has expressed that during a performance of Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat he was having panic attacks but powered through. He has struggled with anxiety and panic attacks and said, "Well, unless you've suffered from panic attacks and social anxiety disorders, which is what I was diagnosed as having, it's hard to explain it. But you go on stage knowing you're actually physically going to die. You will keel over and die." For a younger generation Missy Elliot who performed at the 2015 Super Bowl, the night before her performance had an extreme anxiety attack. With all the research out there a first take away.

So what's your experience with anxiety? Maybe there are some who have been in social situations and felt unsafe, those who have experienced panic attacks. Perhaps it was when you're parents left you and dropped you off for college. Or maybe starting that new job and proving yourself while doubting yourself while feeling overwhelmed. Maybe it was a period of life so intense, with a schedule so packed that it finally caught up with you and you crashed. This series is drawn from Pastor Craig Groeschel a great pastor, but one who crashed and recently wrestled with anxiety as a result of so much in his schedule - to the point he couldn't come up with another creative thought. Pastors too are regular people who struggle with being overwhelmed and anxious. And that's why our first take away just kind of clears the air, *You are not alone with anxiety*. Could you turn to the person next to you, high five them and tell them you are not alone.

And I guess that recognition of I'm not alone would be therapy enough, would be helpful to some extent. But I don't know about you I can here this morning to get help, to get perspective and to be refreshed. And that is exactly what we are going to do as we turn to God. Now a caveat that there are other considerations to anxiety and mental health beyond the spiritual. While I would say every issue is a spiritual issue I don't want to oversimplify the complicated so you should look at the physiological as well - consult with your doctor see a counselor - those are good things. Look at the issue holistically. But in our time together we look at this issue through the spiritual lens. Because the God of the universe, the maker of the heavens and the earth, the one who raises the sun, lowers the moon, and has in mind what's happening in the furthest galaxy can also help us through his Word.

During this series we will be taking a look at many spiritual approaches to anxiety, and I love today's topic because we are going to be considering what it is to pray through pain. Pray through those anxious periods. We'll take a look at a couple Scriptures one from Peter, one from Paul and pick them apart. Let's turn there now and hear God's Word. Before you sit down turn to your neighbor, and tell them, "There's nothing more powerful." Than prayer - the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

I like cars but there is one thing about the car experience that I do not enjoy, and that is when this turns on. Just curious does anyone have one of those going on in their car right now? In our cars they are going on and off - it's kind of a like a sign of a good day. Hey good day babe the light is off, oh turn of fortune it is on again. But what does is the check engine light? It's not the problem itself, but it is a reminder that there is a problem with the gas cap or catalytic converter. It's an alert that it is time to do something to check what is going on to get something fixed.

I bring this up because the feeling of anxiety is like that check engine light. Anxiety as little or as often as it comes is a reminder it's time to do something. *Anxiety is our reminder it is time to pray.* Do you have anything else that reminds you to do things in life. How many kids have parents that remind them to do their homework. Someone recently let me borrow an Apple watch and one of the functions it has is an encouragement to stand. Ding - time to stand, and I get points on the watch just for standing. Some of you have alerts on your phones for pick up times and for meetings, for bills to pay. But what if we reframed our experience with Anxiety. What if we simply saw it as a reminder - it's time to pray. It's time to bring this issue to God.

So Peter told us, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." (1 Peter 5:7) And I love that picture! As often as I have that feeling, whenever I start to worry or get anxious it's my time to cast. Sometimes it's good to visualize - do you remember these. So imagine these velcro balls as the anxiety that comes up. Health, money, kids, work. I throw them on God, and it sticks. And no I don't want it back. God it's stuck to you. No take backs. And as often for however many times. I hurl it on you God. Cast it on God. In your mind do this. I take what is on me and I stick it to God. That's what we do in a musical confession here, that's what you can do during the day in the office, at school, on the road. I hope this visual will get stuck in some of your minds this week. It's time to throw it - it's time for this issue to stick with God. I recently had a conversation with a friend about prayer, and the comment came up, "If it's worth talking about, it's worth praying about." Let me take it further. "If it's worth feeling, it's worth throwing off."

The greatest example of doing this is Jesus. See Jesus had his check engine light come on. He felt what was coming in his life - namely that he would be betrayed, be mocked and hurt, and crucified, and it was overwhelming to him. So much so he said in his own words, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." (Mark 14:34) You are not alone in your anxiety. See Jesus. It's ok, it's normal to feel anxious. But he did something with that check engine light. Some of you know where he was and what he did next. First and this is so cool, first he gathered his friends around him to pray with and for him. This reminds me of the prayer leaders we will have after service from now on. You will have others, friends who can pray with and for you. They will be waiting for any and all who want prayer.

But then he turns toward God and he says, "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will." (Mark 14:36) So much we can learn here. First when it comes to prayer you have the right to call the God of the universe Father, all because of Jesus. He believes in the power of the Father. All things are possible. Do you believe that when you are not strong enough he is. Jesus did. Look what he's trying to do. Maybe he's learned to do this according to his humanity. He's like father catch - let it stick. Please Father take it. But this one time, the Father couldn't. This one Jesus would endure so you and I could be set free. And this was the price of our salvation. But you see our example in Jesus, and it's so good, so valid an approach that the Father honored it - look what happened in the account. "An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him." (Luke 22:43) Tell me that's not the best thing he could have done with his anxiety.

But how do we cope with anxiety? When the check engine light comes and you feel it - what do you do? Anyone ever feel stuck with dread and maybe afraid to do anything or get out of bed. Do you try to escape? Maybe through tv or get caught in work or a hobby? Do you go to a friend or a family member have coffee. I'm not against some of those. But is it possible we don't always use what is best when it comes to our anxiety? Is it possible we have neglected the God who is here to help us. I think of the hymn we just sang, "Oh, what peace we often forfeit , Oh, what needless pain we bear, All because we do not carry, Everything to God in prayer." And so here again we fall to our knees in repentance and say God honestly I haven't always handled anxiety well. I've sinned in some of my approaches, and I've sinned against you by neglecting you. Forgive me.

And hear this next part clearly. Jesus is so much better than our example, though of course in his perfection he is that. He is our Savior. He is the one who handled anxiety perfectly in our place. He is the one who paid for our redemption though it led to his panic attack. The blood given in prayer and the blood shed on the cross is the reason there is peace. And because we know he is with us, and we know of his victory - there is peace indeed. If you're new to Christianity or just joining us we would love to remind you - that you have the right to peace today. Not because of anything you have done, but simply by believing these words of Jesus as Savior. He himself is our peace. May you feel that, may it wash over you, and may we cling to it today and always.

But now let me give you a powerful picture of peace - to do that I need to talk about jail. At times in Chicago we hear of people in jail - locked up held in custody. Former Governor Rod Blagojevich made the news recently again - people were wondering if he was going to be released. It seems that President Trump was considering commuting his prison sentence and

letting him go free early. There was some excited about this so I guess even neighbors of former governor were putting balloons on his house welcoming him back. We'll see what happens in the ever revolving case here. But I understand the idea of prison - someone is held captive and guards make sure that they don't go out.

So there is a beautiful picture in Scripture today, it's not of Blagojevich in prison. No it's our hearts and minds locked in there, and there is someone who will not let them out. It says, "will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." It's not Trump, it's not anxiety - but look at what v 7 of Philippians says, "And **the peace of God**, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." I'd I love this imagery. So anxiety comes knocking - I'm here for your mind and your heart. Peace of God says sorry - it's all locked up. Negative opinions about us come up based on what others have said, or what we feel about ourselves. Sorry locked up. The devil comes at us with guilt, shame, and fear. I'm sorry to tell the peace of God's got my mind and my heart. Why? 'Cause I prayed through it. 'Cause I gave it to God. See v7 was a result of v6 which said, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And..." *Peace stands watch over our hearts and minds when we pray.*

But a very practical consideration is how do we pray? You know my background was in church, my dad was a pastor. And I remember worship services with some incredibly eloquent prayers with big words that all flowed together. We beseech thee El Shaddai, acquiesce to the supplication of thine servants. And I have nothing against those prayers, but then it made me think - if I can't pray like that - can I or should I even pray? But what do you think can we pray even if we don't use big words and eloquent language? Absolutely. Here are a few practical considerations. 1) **You can address God as Father.** Didn't you see that in Jesus. Abba, Father. When the disciples were wondering how to pray they approached Jesus. And in Jesus master class called the Lord's Prayer - the first thing he taught is you can call God, Father. That is because of Jesus and through faith in him we are the children of God 2) **Close a pray in Jesus' name.** This reminds me of cell phones. How many of you have Att? Verizon? Sprint? These are called the carriers for our phones, they use satellites to bounce our messages to each other. The Bible is very clear there is only one carrier of our prayers and reason that we have access to the Almighty. Consider this verse, "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus." (1 Tim 2:5) 3) **Rely on the Holy Spirit.** Let say you forget to pray about something really important or think that your thoughts didn't come across clearly. Know that the Spirit who is inside of you knows how to interpret your heart to the heart of the Father. "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. (Romans 8:26) Those are just cliff notes but perhaps look at it this way.

This year before school I had the privilege of doing daddy daughter days with my girls. And I'm always amazed at how differently God made them. Because they are made completely different what I do, and how I interact is also different. It means that as Dad I take Bella to dinner - Greek Isles and a Marvel Movie. And for Nadia I take her to Skyzone and Panda Express. My interactions with them are so special, but they are incredibly unique - because God made them differently. Even how we talk to each other is different. What they share - how and

when they are share it is different. Nadia's more concise in her expressions, where as Bella may be more verbose.

If I as a Father know to interact with each child different. Does our Heavenly Father know and expect the same. I think so. And that doesn't just explain the different walks with have with him but also your prayer life. You don't have to explain to him if you are man of not many words - don't you think he knows that by now. Or if you tend to use many words. You don't have to apologize for not using lofty language, he probably understands your speech patters. You especially don't have to apologize that you don't pray like someone else - your relationship is unique. *Prayer is simply talking to the Father who loves and knows you.* And he loves to hear from you. Which is why if you are around me or meet with me - there are times I might ask you to pray. I don't have a better pipeline. It's why we have implemented prayer leaders who will use their own language to pray for you. Their prayers are just as powerful.

And what if, what if we were a people who prayed often about so many things. What if we unleashed the power of prayer more and more in our homes and in our communities and in our lives - whenever the check engine light came on. Think of how God would be honored by our surrender to him, and how he might respond to our trust in him.

And the time for getting this right is now in this age. For there is much that can make us anxious. But what does Scripture say. Be anxious for nothing. Hurricane Dorian, School, kids, health, the future. All of it. The greek words be anxious for nothing sound like this "marianate maiden" That greek word maiden, maiden, maiden - kind of sounds like mayday, mayday, mayday. Mayday was distress signal given for boats and airplanes in trouble. Mayday. We have mayday kind of days. Ahh. But mariantate maiden - be anxious for nothing for no mayday. Why because we are going to bring it to God in prayer. *Prayer eliminates our maydays.* May you find that to be the case. And may the peace of God which transcends all understanding, stand guard over the cell, be a fortress when those days come, surround your heart and your mind through faith in Christ Jesus. Amen.

